INDIAN PAINTING



IRIS COLOUR BOOKS
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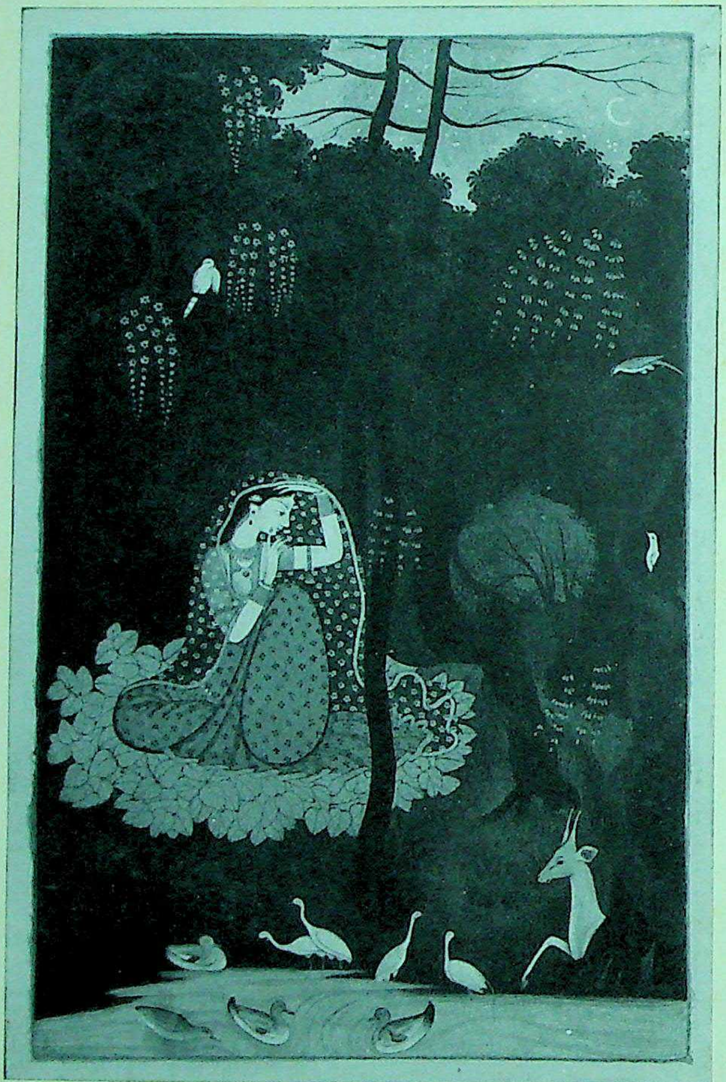


Figure 1

THE LADY AT THE TRYST c. 1785, Garhwal, Punjab Hills

INDIAN PAINTING

FIFTEEN COLOUR PLATES

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY
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TO
HELENA HAYWARD

THE IRIS COLOUR BOOKS
EDITOR: PROF. DR. HANS ZBINDEN

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Figure 2

KRISHNA WITH RADHA AND THE COW-GIRLS c. 1785, Kangra, Punjab Hills

INDIAN PAINTING MAY, at first sight, suggest a series of contradictions. Its main qualities are so expressive of the Indian genius that only India could have successfully produced them. Yet at different periods, foreign cultures have had decisive influence. In the 12th century, Muslim invaders began to establish foreign dynasties and in the 16th century, the main styles of painting were all affected by Persian practice. Later in the century, European miniatures and engravings also suggested techniques. Such differences in inspiration were as great as those between Islam and Hinduism in religion or between the Persian, Sanskrit and Western traditions in poetry. Yet Indian painting is neither Persian nor Western and we can only ascribe its national character to the overriding stimulus of India itself. But perhaps the greatest contradictions appear in style. During the two thousand years of its history, Indian painting has ranged between two quite different forms of expression. The first — a style of supple naturalism — is in line with Western ideas from the Renaissance to the mid-19th century. Men and women, birds, animals and trees were all depicted with sensitive grace and devices such as graded tones, receding planes and shaded contours were freely employed. The result was an art of sensuous refinement in which the charms of courtly living were exquisitely affirmed. The second kind of expression, on the other hand, was a style of vigorous distortion — a style for which the closest Western analogies are Irish and Northumbrian miniatures of the 7th and 8th centuries, Romanesque illumination of the 12th and in the 20th century,

the paintings of Picasso. In this style the actual likenesses of men and women were not conveyed, but, instead, there was a deliberate exaggeration of certain physical traits. Eyes, breasts and haunches were brusquely enlarged, clothes appeared angular and jagged and figures were often rendered in single flat planes. Colours also were introduced for symbolic or emotional purposes — a flat expanse of burning red often implying the ardours of passion. The result was an art of savage vitality, notable for its bold rhythmical line, its powerful colour but above all, for its emotional intensity.

These styles are so different in character that it is difficult to believe that both can be Indian. Yet despite their seeming contradiction, this is, in fact, the case and their Indian character can perhaps be explained by reference to a single common purpose. Although Indian painting was often concerned with gods and goddesses and with the feudal great, the theme most generally favoured was passionate romance. From early times, romantic love had been connected with the highest bliss, the feminine form was viewed with delight and passion itself was regarded as a symbol for the ultimate goal of life, union with God. For social reasons, Indian morality discouraged liaisons and marriages were usually arranged by families. Yet romantic love remained the ideal and throughout Indian poetry it received enraptured expression. It is this theme which came to dominate Indian painting, each style being equally appropriate for its treatment. The style of naturalism stressed the physical charms which underlay romance, the style of distortion the passionate fervour with which they were regarded. The one revealed Indian physical grace, the other the intensity of Indian feelings. Although, as styles, no forms of art could be more different, their devotion to this common theme gave them a vitally Indian character and formed the chief Indian contribution to painting.

The first interpretation of romantic love in Indian painting occurs in the earliest surviving Indian murals. Beginning in the 1st century B. C. and continuing until the 6th or 7th centuries A. D., frescoes were executed on the walls and ceilings of the Buddhist cave-temples of Ajanta. Their purpose is, at first sight, severely religious — to portray the Buddha or to illustrate his previous existences. But there are certain circumstances which suggest that this is too restricted a view. In early India, nature spirits were believed to be rampant, each building was thought to possess a presiding spirit and one of the vital functions of Ajanta paintings was to charm the spirit of the shrine. Moreover, at the time when the greatest sequences were painted — in the closing quarter of the 5th century A. D. — the Buddha was already envisaged as a saviour god, a being who possessed, at the very least, the majesty of an earthly king. Like Rococo churches in Europe, his shrines were regarded as courts and as a result, not only are scenes of court life included in the frescoes but dancing-girls who were normal adjuncts of the palaces are vividly displayed. The result is an art which illustrates the first main style of Indian painting but also communicates a delight in womanly physique. The style with its subtly blending hues, dignifying outline and rounded shading is maturely naturalistic while "dreams and fantasies of the female form and its promise of bliss" are its dominant subject. Eager girls distil their enchantments from the walls, ladies with a bland softness proclaim the joys of love and far from stressing the early Buddhist thesis that misery was due to passion, it is rather the melancholy of denial which is emphasised in the pictures. If, in fact, we are to find an analogy for Ajanta painting, we must turn to the love-poetry of Kalidasa, a Sanskrit poet of about the year 400.

"Thrilled with the fresh earth-scented air
And the drip and drizzle of falling drops
Youthful women express their joy in life
With strings of pearls on their dainty breasts
And soft white linen on their perfect hips
And the glamour of their moving waists".

Such a sensuous surrender to feminine luxury was exactly expressed in the elegant naturalism of Ajanta and until the 10th century this cultured style remained the accepted norm for painting. From then onwards, however, a new tendency began to develop. In the Jain cave-temples at Elura (c. 10th century), dancing-girls were still depicted with moulded limbs but instead of displaying a languid grace, the figures had now a strident litheness. A similar air of frenzy characterizes the tiny frescoes, also of the 10th century, on another and separate building at Elura — the main hall and western porch of the rock-cut Hindu temple of Kailasa. And, although any exact connection would be difficult to establish, we can perhaps see in the altered mood of painting a reflection of the growing anarchy. Leisured romance was no longer in tune with contemporary conditions and in the 11th and 12th centuries it was only in Bihar and Bengal under their Buddhist rulers that a style of fluent naturalism persisted. During this time, the Buddhist communities, spurred perhaps by the drastic decline of Buddhism in other parts of India, commissioned a series of manuscripts recording their scriptures. The texts were copied in heavy black lettering on thin palm-leaf and each pile of leaves was protected by wooden covers. On these covers and at places in the text, miniatures of leading figures in Buddhist legend were executed — the style with its smooth elegance being closely parallel to that of Ajanta. Such art was an exception — we might almost call it an anachronism — for by the twelfth century at Elura, in a series of frescoes on another and different porch of the Kailasa temple, the southern-most, there were already signs of reaction against too suavely modelled a grace. Not only had a feeling of disquiet affected rhythm, but what is more important, there was now a new preference for sharply angular forms and large distended eyes. The Ajanta ideal of gracious softness had broken down and the second mode of Indian expression had taken its place. It is this style — a style of bold distortion — which was to characterize Indian painting from the 12th to 15th centuries.

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The miniatures which illustrate this second style were executed first on palm-leaf and then, after 1400, on paper, for the Jain monasteries and libraries of Western India. Side by side with Buddhism, Jainism had developed a way of life seeking to conquer destiny by carefully regulated conduct and like Buddhism, it had eventually deified its founder. Its stronghold was in the merchant class of Western India and it is once again disturbed political conditions which may possibly account for aspects of the painting. From the early 11th century, Muhammadan invaders had terrorised Northern India, later establishing a new dynasty. In 1200, Bihar and Bengal were subjugated and from 1300 onwards, Gujarat in Western India and Malwa in Middle India were Muslim States. In 1347, the first of several Muslim kingdoms was founded in the Deccan. Some of these Muslim intruders quickly developed an Indian outlook but the abrupt arrival of alien rulers may well have unnerved the peace-loving Jains. The new conditions made it urgently necessary to preserve their scriptures and from the 12th century onwards pious and wealthy donors achieved religious merit by commissioning

copies of the most important texts. At first the accompanying miniatures showed traces of shading but a little later this was dispensed with and the salient idiom became a wiry outline. Each figure was invested with savage ferocity, noses were sharply pointed and the second or further eye was shown as if detached and projecting into space (Plate 2). Such a style was peculiarly relevant to the Jain position. With their belief in ascetic conduct, a style suggesting puritanical denial was obviously more appropriate than one which proclaimed the joys of love. The miniatures were intended to sanctify a text rather than safeguard a shrine. It was therefore unnecessary to woo a presiding spirit by portraying fleshly charms. At the same time, the presence of Muslim rulers may well have induced a feeling of supressed resentment. No longer supported by the court, the Jains found themselves a weak but determined community and in this wild and savage style, we can perhaps detect the unconscious expression of hidden defiance. These considerations may have affected the style in its earliest stages. Later, however, as more and more pictures were produced, the angular distortions were probably regarded as integral parts of the Jain texts, as signs of their Jain character and may thus have acquired a ritualistic sanction. Certainly in the 15th century, the Jains were no longer actively resentful of Muslim domination and, in fact, it was the Muslim art of Persia which now affected their painting. The style of this later Jain painting is the same as that of the earlier but there is now a brilliant richness of decoration deriving from contact with Persian miniatures, foreigners are portrayed in Persian garb and the lithe and angular figures possess a new air of savage glory.

Jain pictures may, at first sight, appear to have little to do with the main theme of Indian painting. The early glowing rapture is totally wanting and it is as if we have entered a dark age of Indian art. Indeed, the doyen of Indian critics, Rai Krishnadasa, has labelled this painting "the style of decadence". None the less, its leading idioms were to prove of great importance in the 16th century when, although the style itself was replaced by other modes of expression, certain idioms were adjusted to passionate and romantic ends (Plate 2). The prime factors in this vital change were certain Muslim courts and to understand their influence, we must briefly consider the general state of Indian painting in the year 1500.

At the beginning of the 16th century, painting in India was confined to three main areas. In Western, Middle and Eastern India, the style developed by the Jains was the only kind of painting extant. In Rajput and other Hindu circles, romance had received religious sanction in the cult of Krishna, the divine lover, and certain poems extolling Krishna's adventures had been illustrated. The style of these illustrations, however, was entirely Jain and in this respect, Indian painting had seemingly reached a dead-end, there being no apparent alternative to its narrow rigid manner. The second area possessing painting was the extreme South where wall-painting deriving from the early Elura style had still survived at Vijayanagar. There remained Orissa, where palm-leaf editions of the KAMA SUTRA, a text-book of erotics, and the Sanskrit poem, the GITA GOVINDA, had been illustrated with wiry fierceness. Apart from the art of these three areas, there was apparently no other painting in India and whatever painting existed was moribund. Such a situation was highly critical for Indian painting and it is here that Muslim courts were to make their vital contribution. Muslim states were the only dynasties in India with external connections, Persia was the country with which they were most nearly linked and it was through the introduction of Persian styles of painting that new vitality was achieved.

The first Persian style to fulfill this vital function was the style known as Turkman, current in the late 15th century at Shiraz, a town in southern Persia. Earlier in the century,

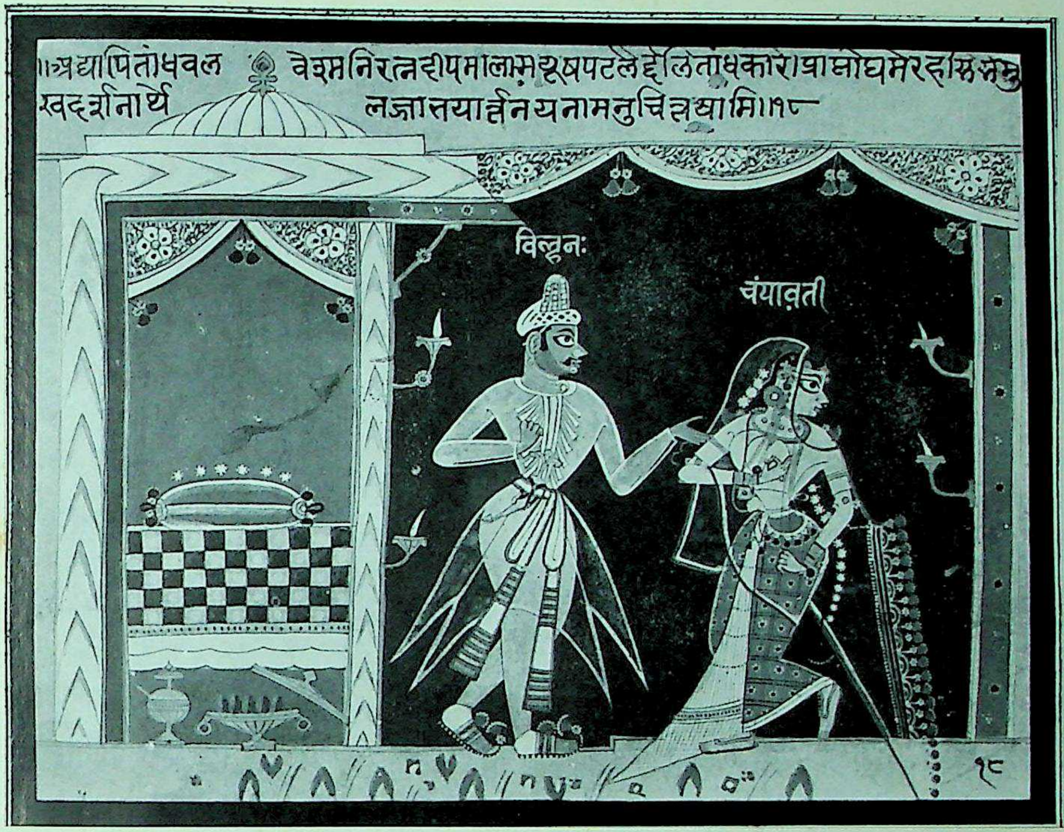


Figure 3

THE LADY AND HER LOVER c. 1580, Jaunpur, Eastern India

Turkman tribes from Central Asia had occupied north-western Persia and had there developed a school of Persian painting in marked contrast to that of their rivals, the Timurids. In the course of the century, Turkman power had expanded over much of Persia, and the main centre of Turkman painting had become Shiraz. The Shirazi style with its lack of depth, absence of modelling and freedom from perspective was in close accord with Indian conventions but it was considerably richer and more complex than any painting by the Jains. It had also been employed to illustrate not only manuscripts of the Shahnama or Persian Book of Kings, but also poems and metrical romances. In about 1500, under Ghayas-ud-din Khilji (1469-1501), the Muslim ruler of Malwa in Middle India, artists trained in this Turkman style illustrated a NIMATNAMA or book of delicacies (Plate 1). We do not know whether they were Persian artists living in India or Indian artists schooled in the new technique. What at least is clear is that a new and subtle transformation at once took place. Certain characteristics of the painting — the formalized vegetation with its lush splendour and the faces and poses of the standing male attendants — are exact expressions of the style in its Persian form. But other details — the highly naturalistic Indian trees, the female figures with their Indian dresses, trim stances and wide staring eyes — are quite un-Persian and reflect an Indian manner. A new tradition, in fact, is on the point of starting and this was to have far-reaching consequences.

Between 1560 and 1580, a small group of pictures were produced at Ahmadnagar, a Muslim court in the Deccan (Fig. 4). They consisted, for the most part, of illustrations to love poetry and the female figures, with their sharp and stately curves, imply a sudden re-emergence of the Indian feeling for romance. The style was derived in part from wall and ceiling paintings of Vijayanagar. But other elements, at once Indian and Persian, were also present. The profiles of the women and the cut of their dresses were closely similar to those in the Malwa book of delicacies and we can only assume that in the sixty years following its introduction, the Turkman style at Malwa had become increasingly Indian and had spread to other centres. It is certainly this same early Malwa style which seems to account for two other developments. In perhaps the year 1560, a local romance was illustrated in Oudh, a part of Eastern India (Plate 2). The style of painting current there was still emphatically Jain and the figures in the series with their fierce faces, detached eyes and angular veils are still Jain in basic character. Yet the slender tapering bodies with their exquisitely curved contours, the choice of romantic theme and the air of feverish passion are creations of the new spirit and prove that a vital stimulus was actively at work. Twenty years later, in about 1580, a similar upsurgence seems to have occurred at Jaunpur, a Muslim state also in Eastern India. Here too the Jain style had been the only form of expression and Jain texts its only subject-matter. Yet under the new stimulus romantic themes were avidly adopted (Fig. 3), two of the greatest Sanskrit love-poems were illustrated, while a special type of love-painting, first developed at Ahmadnagar, was also produced. This kind of painting interpreted poems which from the mid-sixteenth century onwards had been written as accompaniments to the various forms of music. In Northern India, music had crystallized around six basic modes, each with five sub-modes. The mode itself was termed a Raga or prince and a sub-mode his Ragini or queen. These musical "personalities" were now addressed in poems — Ragas being celebrated as courtly lovers and Raginis as glamorous ladies. The result was a sudden cultivation of romance and although part of the local Jain manner was preserved, the style itself was vitally transformed. Faces appeared not in three-quarter view but in profile, the detached projecting eye vanished, the remaining eye was enlarged and flat red back-grounds were inserted to suggest the fervours of passion. With their chiselled contours, the new figures owed much to Ahmadnagar painting but the basic stimulus underlying this new creative stirring was once again the style of Malwa.

Such painting is a direct result of Muslim influence. Yet its salient quality — enthusiasm for romance — is nothing if not Indian and it was in the Hindu state of Udaipur in Rajputana that the new impulse reached its greatest heights (Plate 6). Until the early 17th century, Udaipur does not seem to have had any painting other than illustrations to Jain texts. In 1605, however, a Muslim artist produced at Chawand, the capital, a series of pictures illustrating the love-poetry of music. The style with its predilection for yellows, blacks and reds, and its bounding muscular rhythm was in sharp contrast to the haunting chic-ness of Jaunpur and Ahmadnagar painting. Yet its origin was clearly in Malwa for, more closely than in other offshoots of the Malwa style, its ways of rendering women, trees and vegetation sprang from the idioms first developed in the Malwa book of delicacies. Under two great rulers of Udaipur, Rana Jagat Singh (1628-52) and Rana Raj Singh (1652-81), quantities of pictures were now produced — fable books, religious epics and the annals of chivalry being illustrated with vital simplicity. Yet the chief theme was Krishna and his loves and we can only explain this great efflorescence by bearing in mind the intense devotion of these two Rajput rulers. Because Krishna was both god and lover he was greatly adored, a sense of



Figure 4

LOVERS ON A SWING c. 1575, Ahmadnagar, Deccan

exaltation communicated itself to the artists and glowing reds, browns, greens and oranges charged each picture with romantic ardour. From Udaipur, the style spread in about 1670 to the neighbouring Rajput state of Bundi, to result in further glamorous interpretations of romance (Plate 7), while in Malwa itself there occurred yet another development of the early local manner. Idioms which can only be explained as direct offshoots from the Turkman style of 1500 were freely used, leaves were rendered as a series of simple overlapping scales and trees were reduced to long tapering ovals, surrounding lovers with an air of surging luxuriance.

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This intensely romantic painting is an obvious illustration of the second main form of Indian expression — the style of vigorous distortion. But it was not the only style to develop in the 16th century, for alongside the Muslim kingdoms of Western, Middle, Eastern and Southern India, there existed another Muslim state. The Mughals had only reached India

in 1519, but under Akbar (1556-1605) their power had rapidly expanded until by 1570 they controlled the whole of Northern India. And it was at the Mughal court that a second Persian style was introduced. This second style exactly corresponded to the other kind of Indian expression — the style of supple naturalism — and although it was originally applied to purely Muslim ends, it was to lead to some of the most exquisite renderings of passion in Indian art.

Until the year 1500, Persian painting had been notable for its rigid formality, its hard brilliance, and its use of flat planes and conventional poses. During the 16th century, however, two important changes occurred. On the political level, the Safavid dynasty replaced the Turkman and on the artistic, painting developed a greater pliancy and warmth. Under Shah Ismail Safavi (1502-24), the painter Bihzad introduced a strain of delicate naturalism and although this was regulated by conventional Persian requirements, it pointed the way to a style of greater modelling and more realistic action. Under the second Safavid ruler, Shah Tahmasp (1524-76), painting at Tabriz, the capital, returned to formalism; but at Meshed, a court in the eastern province of Khurasan, a style of fresh and fluent naturalism came to graceful maturity. This style is best illustrated by certain pictures in a Jami manuscript executed at Meshed in the years 1555-65 and now at the Freer Gallery, Washington. And it is this style which appears to have reached India between 1570 and 1580, there to found a new tradition. By this time, two Persian artists, one of whom had almost certainly worked in Khurasan, had joined the Emperor Akbar's court and were in process of assembling a workshop of Indian artists. Akbar was keenly interested in the Indian scene, in Indian thought and religion and in the annals of his own reign. He was determined to be an Indian rather than a Turk or Persian and in the style of painting which now grew up, we find a reflection of his impetuous energy, his belief in resolute action and his flair for restless enquiry (Plate 3). Suavely modelled forms appear in scenes of bustling drama. Each figure is alive with nervous action, faces are portrayed with subtle care and there is a new enthusiasm for lively movement. Between this style and the leading Persian manner, with its stately compositions, brilliant ornamentation and air of arrested life, there is clearly no connection. Equally, between the new style and the Indian mode of brusque distortion, there is no connection either. And we can only assume that faced with Akbar's demand for sensitive records, his Indian artists schooled their talents to a new discipline, adopted the Meshed style brought to India by their Persian mentors, applied it to Indian themes and situations, charged it with Indian feeling and in the process developed a new and vivid kind of Indian naturalism. In this they were aided by the arrival at the court of Western manuscripts and engravings brought by Persian and Indian traders, European adventurers and later by Jesuit missionaries — the Western technique, with its use of shading and recessions, exactly reinforcing the Meshed style. The result was a sudden re-emergence of the first main kind of Indian expression — quite unlike all Indian pictures immediately preceding it, aloofly indifferent to romance, yet in its sensitive rendering of appearances not unlike the first great phase of Indian painting, the art of Ajanta.

These pictures had one main aim — the recording of courtly life — and for two centuries this remained their leading purpose. Under Akbar's successor, the Emperor Jahangir (1605-26), the style acquired a richer dignity. There was a slight reaction against depth and volume and in durbar scenes especially, courtiers in their grave respectful poses were often shown as if standing in a single plane. But it was in the rendering of Nature itself that the greatest

change occured. Unlike Akbar whose genius was more practical and philosophical, Jahangir had an aesthete's delight in flowers, birds and animals. Subjects which under Akbar had occupied only a minor place in the picture's scheme were now depicted with loving exactness. Each bird or flower absorbed a whole page and the subject claimed attention in its own right (Plate 4). This concentration on natural details, however, was little more than a charming aberration for, with the death of Jahangir, the subject lost its attraction — to become popular again only at the end of the 18th century. It was rather to portrait studies of the great nobility that the style reverted (Plate 5) — Jahangir's successor Shah Jahan (1628-58), his sons and courtiers, being drawn with verve and insight, while pose, line and colour contributed an air of aristocratic breeding. Such an art presupposes at least a modicum of imperial keenness and when with Aurangzeb (1658-1707) a chilly puritan became emperor, marked changes occurred not only in subject-matter but in spirit. In technique, precise and careful naturalism remained the goal but Dutch influence, proceeding from the Dutch settlements in the Deccan, seems to have inspired a recourse to chiaroscuro and a new vogue for scenes of darkness-hunters pursuing their quarry under a small moon or ladies visiting their lovers against the empty blackness of the night. The sudden taste for sombre blacks and greys can hardly have been accidental and in it we can perhaps discern the artists' own reactions to the spirit of the times. Only in one respect was there a significant innovation. Throughout the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir and Shah Jahan, women make only fleeting and incidental appearances in Mughal painting and indeed in this respect the Mughals were consistently alien in outlook. Love was regarded not as a source of rapture but as a somewhat prosaic form of private pleasure. Under Aurangzeb, on the other hand, Mughal painting extended its scope. Scenes of amorous indulgence made their appearance and there was a new approximation to Indian sentiment. The emperor himself can hardly have occasioned this revival and we can only conclude that, deprived of imperial support, the artists sought encouragement from lesser patrons. In these pictures, the enchantment with which woman had formerly been invested is markedly wanting, but in some, there are traces of the earlier glow (Plate 9).

Such a reversion to romantic themes prepares us for important changes and in the 18th century, the two styles of Indian painting achieved a new relationship. From 1550 to 1700, the greatest political power in India had been the Mughal empire and under four succeeding rulers, Mughal painting had cultivated a special kind of Indian naturalism. At the same time, the other mode of expression had persisted in Rajputana and Malwa and the two styles had gone on side by side scarcely affected by each other. In Udaipur, as late as 1640, certain mannerisms drawn from the Akbar style of Mughal painting had been absorbed and only Mughal influence can account for the subtleties of depth and modelling which appeared in the offshoot of Udaipur painting at Bundi (Plate 7). But these influences were exceptional and for the most part the two kinds of expression developed on parallel lines and rarely blended. During the 18th century, this situation was entirely altered. As a political power, the Mughal empire began to wane, painting at the capital slackened and it was only in two outlying Muslim centres — Hyderabad in the Deccan and Oudh in Eastern India — that Mughal painting proper was maintained. Between 1600 and 1620, the Deccani court of Bijapur had developed its own kind of naturalism (Fig. 5) — a style parallel to that of Akbar's artists but influenced by the wall paintings of Vijayanagar and by Western pictures arriving from Portuguese Goa. Later in the 17th century, its sumptuous richness vanished and by the 18th century Deccani painting was largely Mughal. A similar development occurred in Oudh

where rulers and their attendants were common subjects and Muslim princesses were depicted with a physical magnificence closely according with Indian ideals (Fig. 6).

The same diffusion of Mughal standards occurred in Rajputana. As the Mughal empire dwindled, Mughal fashions began to dominate the Rajput courts, evoking in the process far greater respect and imitation than when the empire was at its height. At Bikaner, Mughal artists developed a local style of Rajput-Mughal painting and in other States, such as Udaipur and Jodhpur, Mughal example led not so much to the abandonment of the previous style as to a refinement of its manner and the adoption of Mughal subjects. At both these places illustrations of romance gave way to pictures of the local ruler and his court (Plate 10), while at Kotah, a Rajput state adjoining Bundi, tiger-shooting became the favourite subject (Plate 12). Only in fact at two courts in Rajputana was the older theme preserved and then only for short periods. At Kishangarh, a state adjoining Jodhpur, the cult of Krishna by Raja Sawant Singh (c. 1750-c. 1760) resulted in a short-lived school of painting in which the feminine form was rendered with entranced rapture — certain features being exaggerated in order to communicate a feeling of rhythmic loveliness (Plate 11). The style continued the Rajput manner of the previous century — a style concerned more with emotional intensity than with factual representation — but the new delicacy of treatment imbued its distortions with superlative grace. A similar effect was obtained at Jaipur (c. 1790) where ladies of the court were depicted dressed as Krishna and his loves, gracefully posturing in a dance. The figures were painted almost life-size, simple and monumental, totally devoid of modelling or shading yet contriving to express through rhythm of line and purity of colour a feeling of exaltation.

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It was in an altogether different part of India, however, that the greatest developments occurred. Until the second half of the 17th century, the Punjab Hills in Northern India had possessed more than thirty Rajput princedoms but not, so far as we know, a single school of painting. In 1680, however, a style of primitive sophistication suddenly developed in the tiny hill state of Basohli (Plate 13). Its vivid burning colours and wild distortions had close affinities with painting in Udaipur and it is possible that Udaipur artists were in fact responsible for bringing it to the Hills. At Basohli, the inspiration was once again the cult of Krishna and as a result there was yet another upsurgence of poetic romance. But it was less the perfections of feminine form than the ardours of passion which were chiefly stressed — the paintings with their tortured gallants, their wild-eyed ladies and swirling savage trees expressing, to the full, romantic frenzy. Early in the 18th century, the style spread to neighbouring hill states such as Jammu, Chamba, Nurpur and Guler, but it was the arrival of certain Mughal artists at Guler in about 1740 which led to sudden changes.

The style of these artists was similar to that of early Mughal painting under Akbar, and combined a fluent naturalism with a zest for firmly rhythmical line. The Guler ruler, Raja Gobardhan Singh, was keenly alive to romantic poetry and under his patronage there evolved at Guler a style combining the use of flaming red backgrounds and precise poetic symbols with a delicate exploration of feminine charm. More fully than at any time since Ajanta, painting was now concerned with woman as the prime source of romantic enchantment. About the year 1765, the new style spread to Chamba where it fused with a local manner derived from Basohli and produced new variants in female beauty (Plate 14). Its most poetic offshoots, however, occurred at Garhwal and Kangra. At Garhwal, a few Guler artists invested romantic



Figure 5

IBRAHIM ADIL SHAH II. OF BIJAPUR (1580–1626) c. 1610, Bijapur

themes with fresh glamour (Fig. 1), while at Kangra a much larger group of Guler artists flourished under Raja Sansar Chand (1775-1823), the most powerful ruler in the Punjab Hills and one who was especially sensitive to art, religion and poetry. Under his stimulus, the cult of Krishna was yet again accepted as the proper theme of painting (Fig. 2). Radha, Krishna's principal love, was portrayed as the loveliest of women and a world of gentle dalliance was created where the keenest Rajput wishes were exquisitely fulfilled. The Kangra style quickly dominated other schools of painting in the Hills, among them, Nurpur (Plate 15). The style lasted until the

second half of the nineteenth century, to be finally extinguished by the crumbling of the Rajput order under the impact of the West.

This development was typical of the new era for as the century proceeded not only was painting threatened with extinction but Indian attitudes and values became adulterated. European industrial products flooded the country, Western taste was imposed and miniature painting was superceded by printed books, engravings, oleographs and oils. Under British influence, Indian artists discarded their traditional medium of tempera and adopted water-colour, producing for their new patrons examples of "picturesque" manners and customs as well as careful illustrations of natural history. Such work was British rather than Indian in conception and only in one respect can it be said to have had a vitalising influence. At Kalighat in Calcutta, bazaar artists developed a new style by exploiting the rapid brush-work made possible by the thinner water-colour medium. Their illustrations of gods and goddesses and of sumptuous women, mass-produced for the pilgrim traffic at the Kalighat temple, had a bounding line and a rounded fullness of form in proud keeping with earlier ideals. The school lasted until 1930 when it was killed by the competition of German and Japanese prints.

Yet Indian painting has survived and for proof of its existence we must look in two directions. Although at no time comparable in delicacy to court art, painting has often flourished in the villages and in many parts of India, remnants of a rural tradition still exist. The artist minstrels of Bengal, for example, prepare long scrolls illustrating ballads of Rama and Krishna and in Mithila, Bihar, village women still paint the mud walls of their houses with dazzling pictures of gods, goddesses and brides. Each style attempts the very reverse of delicate representation, but in their use of strong emphatic colours, angular rhythm, bold outlines and free distortions of anatomy, they show how natural to the Indian mind is this vital mode of expression. The second kind of painting is by artists trained in the art schools of Bombay, Calcutta, Lucknow, Madras and Delhi. As part of British education, training in European techniques has now become general, the artist is no longer the member of a hereditary profession and his general status approximates to that of the modern artist in Europe. He is a man without a patron, a function or a market. At the same time, there has grown up an acute awareness of modern art itself, with the realisation that if his work is to be of value, the artist must in some way achieve a style that is both Indian and modern. In this respect it is fortunate that at least one of the two main styles of Indian painting is in close accord with modern trends. Yet the problem remains: how in an India abruptly moving towards a cosmopolitan culture can the artist maintain his artistic nationality? There is clearly no simple answer to this question, but in the work of an artist such as George Keyt, we can detect some significant elements — clarity of form, bounding rhythmical line, rapture at the feminine physique, above all, a certain passionate intensity. These qualities have characterized the greatest Indian painting in the past and their persistence is a happy augury for the future.

W. G. Archer



Figure 6

THE PRINCESS AND THE LOTUSES c. 1750, Oudh, Eastern India

NOTES TO PLATES

by W. G. Archer

Plate 1 *Ghayas-ud-din-Khilji, Sultan of Malwa (1469-1501) superintending the preparation of betel-nut.* Illustration to the *Nimatnama* (Book of Delicacies) of Ghayas-ud-din.

Malwa, c. 1500.

Size: $5^1/_4 \times 4^3/_4$ in; 13×12 cm.

India Office Library, London (Ethé 2775).

The present picture illustrates the first known Indian offshoot of a Persian style to develop in India in the 16th century. The clouds with their snake-like rims, the flat male figures and clustering herbage derive directly from the Turkman style of which the most magnificent example so far known is the *Sleeping Rustam* in the British Museum (Basil Gray, *Persian Painting* [Iris, 1948], plate 7). The female figures, on the other hand, with their square-shaped heads, staring eyes, curving haunches and sharply jutting skirts display a quite un Persian approach to feminine form and mark the beginnings of a vital new tradition. It is out of this early 16th century style that later Indian painting in Malwa and much of Rajputana developed.

Plate 2 *The Heroine adorned by her Maid.* Illustration to a romance in Avadhi script. Oudh, Eastern India, c. 1560.

Size: $7^1/_2 \times 4^1/_4$ in; 19×11 cm.

Bharat Kala Bhawan, Banaras.

In this picture, the Jain style of Western and Eastern India has been influenced by Malwa painting. Early characteristics, such as the wiry outline and detached projecting eye, are still present but the former horizontal setting, customary in Jain pictures, has been replaced by a vertical composition. The feminine figures, elegantly elongated, are shown in profile and there is a new arrogance in the dip of the back and the proud curves of the projecting buttocks. The picture shows an aristocratic lady — the heroine of the romance — being adorned by her maid, the latter's hand fingering the detached eye with gentle precision as she blackens the lids. With their over-all air of vicious fierceness, the figures are portrayed as if made for tigerish love while their smart sophistication reveals the supreme importance attached in Indian lovemaking to neatness of toilet.

Plate 3 *The exhausted Akbar.* Illustration to the *Akbarnama* (Annals of Akbar). Faces by Kisu, outline and colouring by Mahesh, Mughal (Akbar period) c. 1600.

Size: 13×8 in; 34×20.5 cm.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (I. S. 2.-1896).

In 1571, the Emperor Akbar, journeying in Multan, a district of Northern India, heard that some wild asses were near at hand. A keen hunter, he set out in pursuit, tramping patiently across the burning sand and far outstripping his carriers of water. As one animal after another was shot, the Emperor grew exhausted till, worn out from the heat, he collapsed. He was only saved by the sudden arrival of his men, "led to him by mystic guides". Akbar whose spiritual leanings were to cause him to found a new religion in 1579, interpreted his rescue as clear proof of divine favour.

In the picture, the successive stages of the incident are compressed into a single all-inclusive scene. To the rear, the main party proceeds on its way, oblivious of the Emperor's condition while, in the foreground, the exhausted Akbar droops beneath a tree. Beside him are the wild asses he has slain. His attendants, newly arrived, are anxiously offering him water. The picture with its air of bustling animation is typical of Akbar-period painting at its height.

Four Birds. By Ikhlas. Plate 4

Mughal (Jahangir period), c. 1610.

Size: 7×5 in; 18×13 cm.

Musée Guimet, Paris (3619, Q, a).

During his summer journeys to Kashmir, the Emperor Jahangir delighted to examine new birds and flowers — his passion for natural history fusing with a poet's delight in shimmering colours and delicate textures. On discovery, a new species would be made over to his artists for portrayal, and in this way a vast collection of bird and flower studies was gradually assembled. Although the subjects assembled can, in most cases, be accurately identified, the present birds do not tally with any known species. The upper pair have the outlines of a pigeon but the tail and colouring of blue magpies, the lower pair the general appearance of a wattled pheasant but the colouring of a monaul. It is possible, therefore, that instead of being drawn from life, as was the usual practice, the present illustrations were merely based on hear-say.

The Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan (1628-58) riding with his son, Prince Dara Shikoh. By Manohar. Mughal (Jahangir period) c. 1615. Plate 5

Size: $9^1/_4 \times 6^3/_4$ in; 23.5×17 cm.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (I. M. 12-1925).

Under the Emperor Akbar, collaboration between different artists was a common feature of Mughal painting — one artist supplying outlines, a second artist colouring and a third faces. The present picture, however, illustrates a different kind of collaboration — the adjustment by a later artist of a work previously completed by another. The picture in its present form represents the Emperor Shah Jahan as a young man riding with his son, Prince Dara. Originally, however, the central rider was almost certainly his father, the Emperor Jahangir and the purple hills suggest that the occasion of the portrait was a visit by Jahangir to his favourite summer retreat, the mountains of Kashmir. Sometime after Jahangir's death, Shah Jahan

caused the faces of the two riders to be repainted — his own features and those of his son replacing the faces of Jahangir and the escort. That the faces are by a second artist, Murad, is noted in two small Persian inscriptions set between the chief figures while the fact that the picture proper is by Manohar, one of Jahangir's leading artists, is recorded in a note, in Shah Jahan's own handwriting, at the base of the picture. With its spacious construction and simple grandeur, the picture illustrates the grave and dignified style which under Jahangir replaced the more dramatic manner favoured by his predecessor.

Plate 6 *Krishna approaching Radha.* Illustration to the *Sursagar* by Sur Das. Udaipur (Rajputana), c. 1650.

Size: $11^1/_2 \times 9^1/_2$ in; 29.5×24 cm.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (I.S.40-1953).

In this picture, a passionate encounter is portrayed with lively vigour. In the upper half, Krishna, the arch lover, approaches Radha's chamber. In the lower half, attended by a maid bearing a fly-whisk and box of betel-nuts, he leads her to the bed. The style is characteristic of Udaipur painting as it developed under Rana Jagat Singh (1628-52) — the hot colouring, geometrical structure and wild ferocious faces all reflecting this ruler's intense absorption in passionate ideals.

Plate 7 *The Lady with a wand of flowers.* Illustration to the musical mode, *Gauri Ragini.* Bundi (Rajputana) c. 1680.

Size: $8^1/_4 \times 4^3/_4$ in; 21×12 cm.

G. K. Kanoria collection, Calcutta.

With Plate 8, an illustration to the special kind of love-poem which accompanied conventional forms of Indian music. The mode, *Gauri Ragini,* was interpreted as a young and lovely girl, parted from her lover and driven to distraction by the enchantments of the spring. Alone with her desires, she strolls in a lush garden, holding in her hand a wand of flowers. The picture with its softly moulded central figure and luxuriant vegetation illustrates the Udaipur style (Plate 6) after its adoption in the neighbouring Rajput State of Bundi. There is now a greater refinement in the portrayal of the body, a more conscious delight in feminine charm and gorgeous richness of colouring.

Plate 8 *The Lady and the Deer.* Illustration to the musical mode, *Kakubha Ragini.* Malwa, c. 1680.

Size: $11^3/_4 \times 8$ in; 30×20 cm.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (I.S.85-1952).

In this picture, a musical mode is envisaged as a lonely lady longing for her lover. Above her looms an empty hillside and only the wild deer are there to pester her with love. In her hands she holds two garlands with which she would have decked her lover, had he come. The lover, however, is missing and her whole pose suggests a blank despondency and aching care. The picture with its conventions for water, the sharp flint-like eyes, slim elongated figure, "Persian" rocks, and upper band of flowers is a strange amalgam of stylistic influences — suggesting that, parallel to the main Malwa style of the late seventeenth century, another Malwa style existed, employing similar colours but embodying idioms drawn from Ahmadnagar.

The Lady on a Terrace. Mughal (Aurangzeb period), c. 1700. Plate 9

Size: $10^1/_4 \times 6^3/_4$ in; 27×17 cm.

Bodleian Library, Oxford (M.S.Ouseley Add.171.f.15)

In this picture, the theme is once again "the torment of love unsatisfied". A lady, feverish with love, reclines on a terrace in the sultry stillness of a summer night. Her maids strive to distract her but her whole posture suggests a state of restless longing, for which the only cure will be her lover's return. Various details in the picture evoke a mood of glamorous disquiet — the violently protruding angle of the lady's arm, the jagged vertical border to the maid's dress, the unwieldy trees brusquely rising against the pale sky, the mellow glow of the nude skin. Despite an obvious relish for magnificent form, a certain prosaic complacency pervades the picture and it is this which reveals its Mughal character. Mughal artists and their patrons consistently shrank from that willing surrender to poetic delight which characterises other styles of Indian painting and the result, in pictures of court beauties, was a somewhat calculating assessment of feminine charms rather than the expression of exalted rapture at a lovely physique.

Raja Ram Singh (1750) of Jodhpur riding with an escort. Plate 10
Jodhpur (Rajputana), c. 1750.

Size: $11^3/_4 \times 9^1/_2$ in; 30×24.5 cm.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (I.S.281-1951).

An example of the stately style of portraiture which developed at Jodhpur in Rajputana in the second half of the eighteenth century — the massive charger with its clear, clean-cut form (an exact emblem of its rider), the huge and towering turbans, redolent of sinister pomp, and the escort with their bland, up-tilted faces and arrogant swagger all contributing to the final air of feudal glory.

Krishna with Radha on a terrace at night. Kishangarh Plate 11
(Rajputana), c. 1760.

Size: $12^3/_4 \times 9^1/_4$ in; 32.5×23.5 cm.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (I.S.90-1954).

During the eighteenth century, the worship of Krishna, the divine lover, relieved some of the deepest stresses in courtly society. As a consequence, Krishna's principal love, Radha — a married cow-girl — was transformed into the loveliest of princesses while Krishna himself was portrayed as the acme of aristocratic grace. In the present picture, certain idioms peculiar to Kishangarh suggest the intense nobility of the two lovers and their rapturous exaltation. Suavely curving lines define their sinuous forms while long up-tilted eyes, domed by arched eyebrows, give each of the figures an imperious distinction. An air of gentle tenderness marks their dalliance — Krishna's fingers barely touching Radha's veil, Radha's hand shyly stroking Krishna's wrist, implying by their very reticence the exquisite character of their feelings.

Plate 12 *Raja Umed Singh (1771-1820) of Kotah with his minister Zalim Singh shooting tiger.* Kotah (Rajputana), c. 1780.

Size: $15^1/_2 \times 12^3/_4$ in; 39×33 cm.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (I.S.563-1952; G-A.P. 215).

In this picture, two princely figures are shown mounted in a tree while a buffalo, tied up at the foot, successfully decoys two tigers. It is a little after dusk — the full moon just rising over the typical Kotah hills topped with their low walls of rocky cliff. Tiger shooting was a favourite pastime of Kotah rulers, even ladies of the court engaging in it from the little shooting boxes, which are still discernible in the Kotah landscape. Until 1770, the Kotah court had no painting, but from then onwards, artists from Bundi settled in the state and quickly developed the totally new style represented in this picture. The lucid tubular trunks, the coral-like branches, the sleek tigers and writhing cliffs all express an attitude of naive and dreamlike wonder. The style which is unique in Rajput painting lasted from 1770 to about 1860 and was first brought to Western notice by Colonel T. G. Gayer-Anderson.

Plate 13 *Lady with her Maid in a garden by night.* Basohli (Punjab Hills), c. 1680.

Size: $10^1/_2 \times 7$ in; 27×18 cm.

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (17.3203).

In this picture, which may illustrate the musical mode, *Todi Ragini,* a lady stands holding a flower while a maid beguiles her with music from a vina. A deer symbolising the absent lover advances through the trees. The time is night, white mist swirling in smoky wraiths against the darkening blue while banks of clouds, vivid with lightning, presage a wild and passionate night. The slender tree, loaded with flowers, symbolises the lady's blossoming youth and birds, soaring in the sky, suggest her wistful yearning. The style with its "savage intensity" and keen romantic fervour is typical of the highly sophisticated painting which from antecedents in the far-off state of Udaipur in Rajputana came to sudden maturity at Basohli in the years 1680 to 1700.

The Lady with the yo-yo. Chamba (Punjab Hills), c. 1765 Plate 14

Size: $7^1/_4 \times 4^1/_2$ in; 18×11.5 cm.

British Museum, London (O. A. 1948-10-9-0139)

In this picture, a young and sensitive princess is playing with a yo-yo — the toy, suspended from her finger, jerking nervously up and down in unison with her thoughts. The ardent character of her brooding is suggested by the brilliant red of her dress — scarlet being constantly associated in Indian thought with love and passion. The noble face with its high, rounded brow, the tall, elongated figure and the graceful stance are characteristic of Chamba painting after its first Basohli-like manner had been mellowed by influence from Guler.

Radha and Krishna walking in the grove. Plate 15

Nurpur (Punjab Hills), c. 1780.

Size: $10^1/_2 \times 7^1/_4$ in; 26.5×18.5 cm.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (I.M.156-1914).

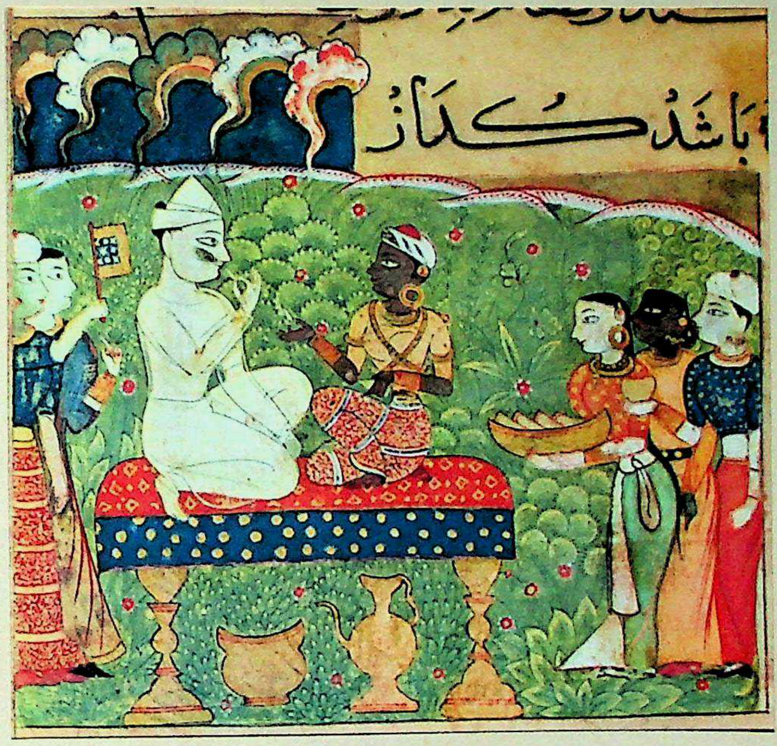
The present picture, formerly attributed to Kangra, illustrates the influence of Guler painting on the art of a neighbouring hill state, Nurpur. In the lower righthand corner, Radha is bowing at Krishna's feet, her attitude of adoration revealing her awareness of Krishna's godhead; while a little higher, she and Krishna are walking together, the blossoming trees suggesting the delicate character of their expanding love. Radha is now shielding her eyes from Krishna's charms, surrendering with gentle dignity to his passionate purpose. With its flowing rhythmical line, superlative grace and sense of strong resolve, the picture represents the effortless blending of religion and romance which has consistently ennobled Indian experience.

ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT

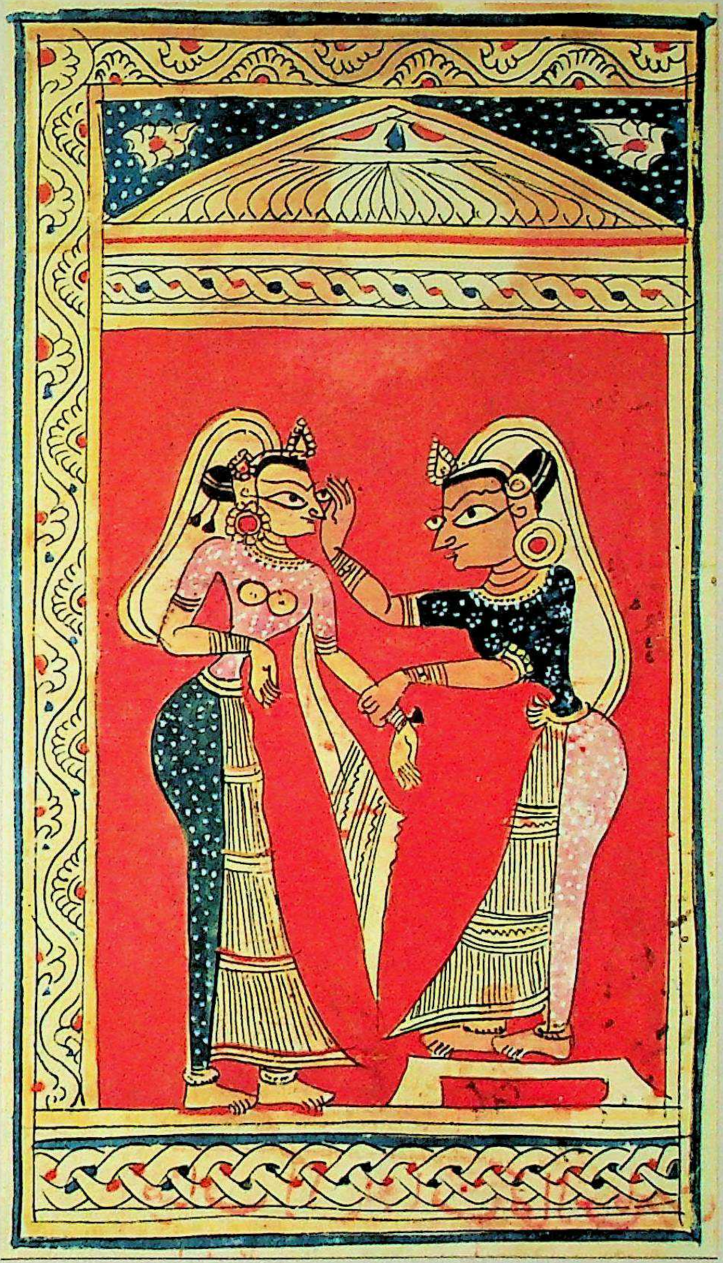
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COLOUR PLATES



I



II



III



IV



V



VI



VII



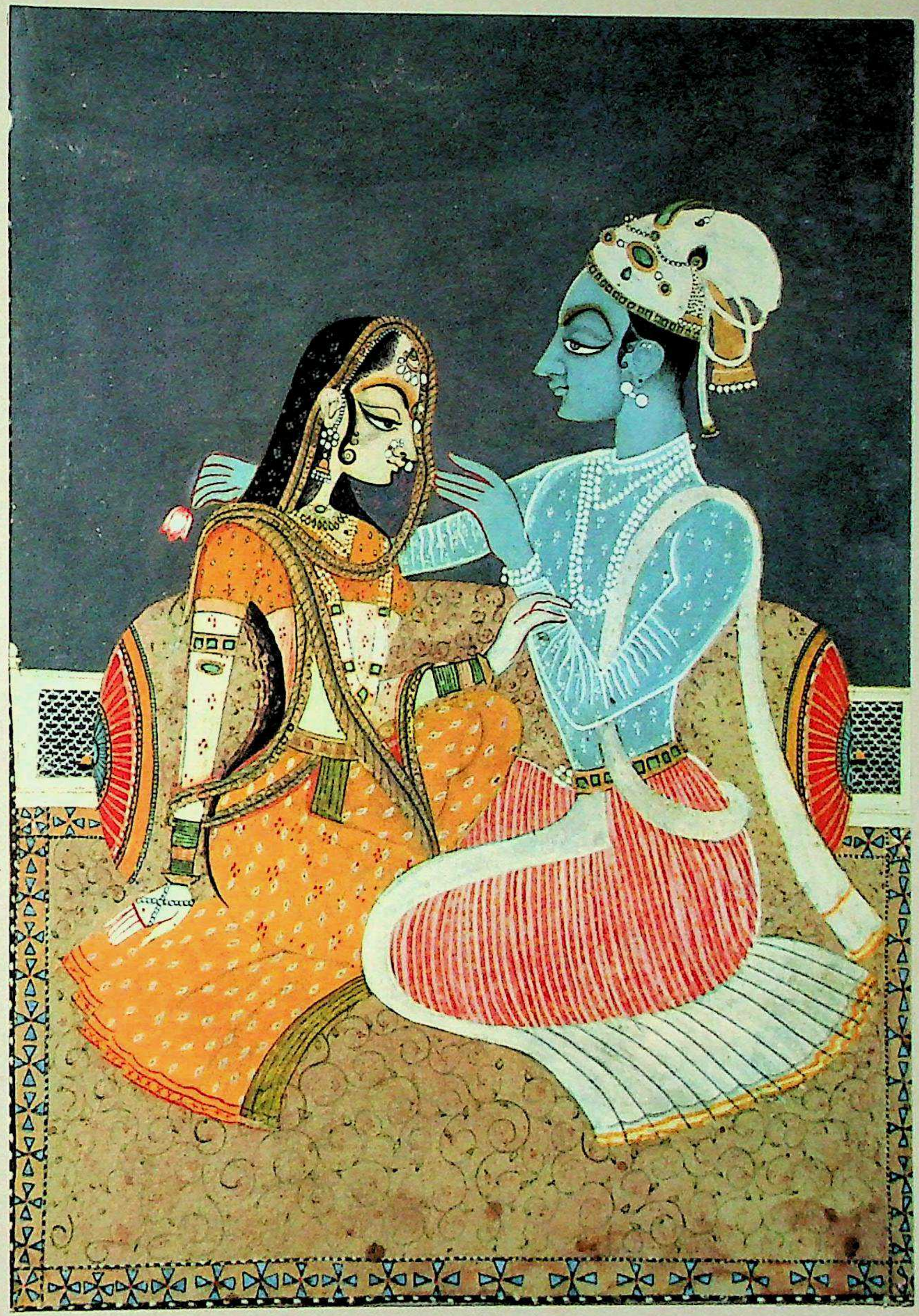
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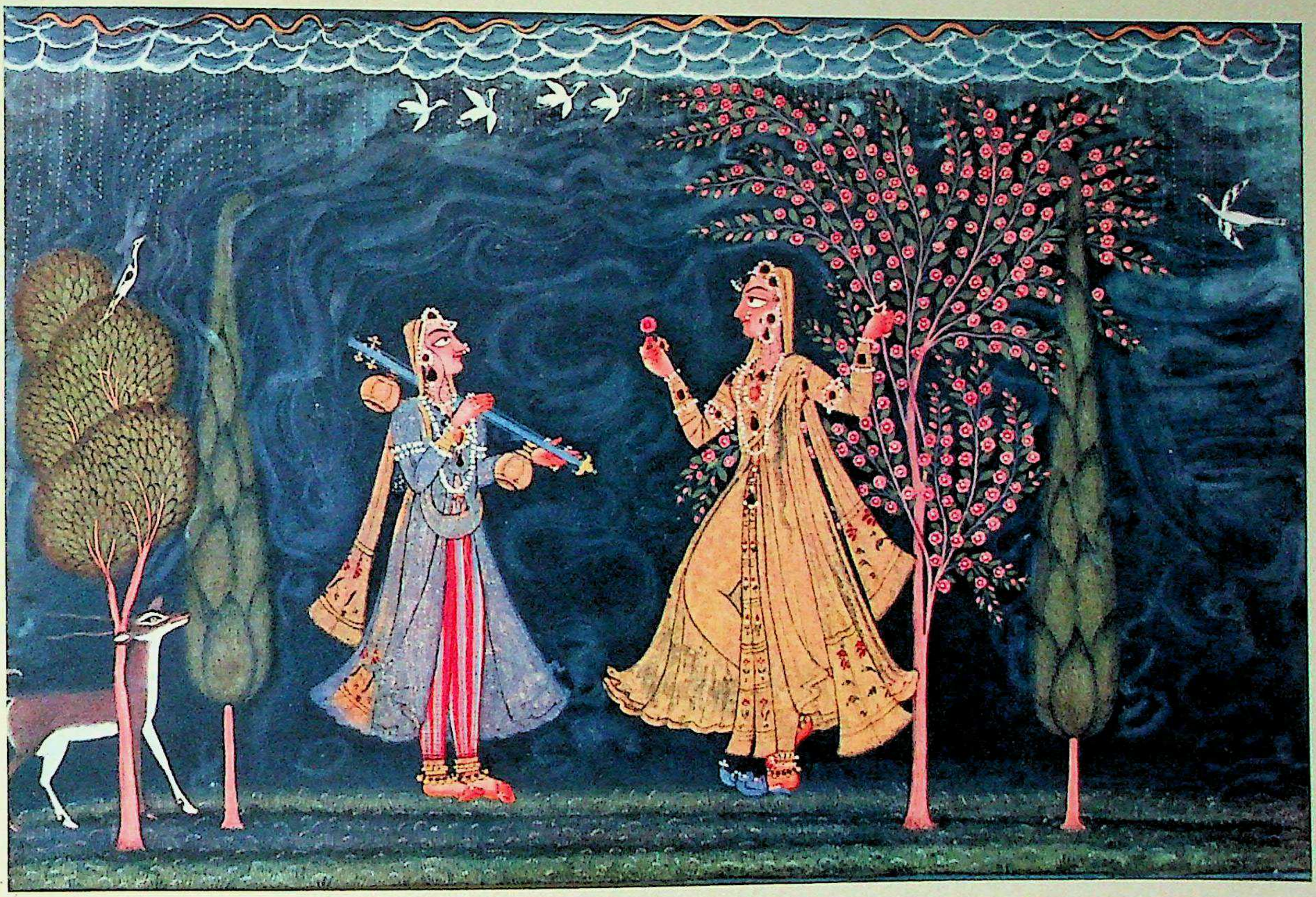
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XI



XII



XIII



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XV